

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 012 972

EA 000 784

THE STRENGTH OF A SPARROW.

BY- HOWE, HAROLD, II

PUB DATE 22 SEP 67

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.64 16P.

DESCRIPTORS- *FEDERAL AID, *STATE AID, TAX SUPPORT, *TAX ALLOCATION, SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, *COMMUNITY SUPPORT, *URBAN SCHOOLS, BOARDS OF EDUCATION, SCHOOL ROLE, INNOVATION, OPEN ENROLLMENT, STUDENT TEACHER RATIO, WORK STUDY PROGRAMS, PARENT PARTICIPATION, SCHOOL DISTRICTS,

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION IN SOME STATES OF STATE TAX MONIES FOR SCHOOLS HAS RESULTED IN A MUCH HIGHER PROPORTIONATE FUNDING FOR SUBURBAN SCHOOLS THAN URBAN SCHOOLS. THIS FISCAL INEQUITY IS DUE TO EXCESSIVE RELIANCE UPON THE NUMBER OF DOLLARS OF ASSESSED VALUE BEHIND EACH STUDENT IN THE DISTRICT AND TO FAILURE BY THE STATES TO RECOGNIZE THE DISPROPORTIONATE EXTENT OF A CITY'S OBLIGATIONS TO PROVIDE MUNICIPAL NONSCHOOL SERVICES. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT ASSISTS IN THE CORRECTION OF THIS IMBALANCE BY PROVIDING (1) ADDITIONAL MONEY FOR SERVICES FOR ALL SCHOOL CHILDREN AND (2) SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR THE CULTURALLY DEPRIVED CHILD, OTHERWISE HEADED FOR FAILURE. PITTSBURGH'S SUCCESS IN IMPROVING ITS FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM WAS ACHIEVED BY AN APPOINTED BOARD OF EDUCATION WHICH ENJOYED BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT OF CITY BUSINESS, MINORITY, AND INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITIES. BOTH A MORE REALISTIC PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY AND A SYSTEMATIC COORDINATION OF ALL POSSIBLE RESOURCES ARE NEEDED. SEVEN NEW APPROACHES TO OLD PROBLEMS ARE MADE, INCLUDING (1) CONSORTIUMS WITH OPEN ENROLLMENT FOR JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, (2) INDIVIDUAL SCHEDULING FOR ACHIEVING AS WELL AS NONACHIEVING STUDENTS, AND (3) INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AS AIDES AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE SCHOOL'S DECISIONMAKING PROCESS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE URBAN SCHOOLS CONFERENCE (WASHINGTON, D.C., SEPTEMBER 22, 1967). (JK)

ED012972

THE STRENGTH OF A SPARROW*

An Address by Harold Howe II
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

There is an old Arabian legend about a spindly little sparrow who was lying on his back in the middle of the road. A horseman came by, dismounted, and asked the sparrow what on earth he was doing lying there upside down like that.

"I heard the heavens were going to fall today," said the sparrow.

"Oh?" said the horseman, "And I suppose you think your puny little bird legs can hold up the heavens?"

"One does what one can," said the sparrow; "one does what one can."

Well, the heavens seem to be falling on our cities, and if we sparrows do what we can, I'm not so sure but what together we can hold up the heavens at that.

First we have to understand why they are falling.

One reason is the social change that is taking place at a rate many Americans find alarming. The story is so familiar that I shall not dwell upon it here. We are stuffed to our eyeballs with data on the pathology of the cities. Instead I would like to talk with you for a few moments about economic change.

For several decades school board associations have been worrying about the economic problems confronted by suburban school districts--

*Before the Urban Schools Conference, sponsored by the National School Boards Association and the Office of the Vice President, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C., Friday, September 22, 1967, at 10 a.m.

districts that were struggling to house and teach classes that doubled and tripled not only as a consequence of the post-war baby boom but as a consequence also of the flight from the cities to the surrounding bedroom communities. The big question was how these communities, with a tax base composed of dwellings which provide more children than money, could build enough schools and support an adequate educational program. As an answer, school board associations urged State legislatures to equalize the tax burden for suburban property owners.

Today the problem is reversed, and it is the city that is in trouble. But State legislatures, locked into the formulas of the forties and the fifties, still give preferential treatment to the suburbs as they apportion their education funds.

A study of 35 cities by Professor Seymour Sacks reported in Urban Affairs Quarterly shows that the cities averaged \$124.92 per pupil in State aid last year, while the suburban districts got an average of \$165.54 per student--a difference of \$40.62. And to cite a specific example, while the State of Ohio was providing the city of Cleveland with \$99 per pupil--pupils outside the eight large metropolitan areas of the State received \$161 per pupil.

Such imbalances arise, as you well know, from excessive reliance on a single piece of economic data: the number of dollars of assessed value behind each student in the district.

It is time, I think, that we considered more relevant data.

City resources are tapped by a wide range of special municipal services, and this urban "overburden" is rarely given due recognition by the States. I am of course referring to the disproportionate expenditures that the cities must make for non-school services--for police and fire protection, for garbage collection, for health and welfare services, for streets and streetlighting, for street cleaning and sewage treatment, for community action programs and public housing and museums and public transit systems--not only for their own residents but for all the commuters who use these services every day without adequately reimbursing the city.

An Office of Education Cooperative Research project last year showed that the cities spent an average of 65 percent of their local tax dollars on non-school services, leaving only 35 percent for education. In the non-metropolitan areas, these percentages were reversed. The suburban areas had 65 percent of their funds available for the schools.

For many cities the contrast is even more dramatic. Let me give you a few examples: in the State of Pennsylvania, communities outside the metropolitan areas spend only 22 percent of local tax funds on non-school items. The city of Philadelphia spends 58 percent.

In San Francisco 71 percent of local tax funds are required for non-school items, while the State-wide figure is 49 percent. The figure for New York State is also 49 percent--but the city of Buffalo spends 76 percent on non-school items.

Concurrently, while the demands on the city's services and revenues have been increasing, its tax base has been decreasing as one corporation after another has heeded the siren song of handsome new industrial parks developed in the suburbs.

In Baltimore, for example, the number of tax dollars behind each pupil dropped 19.3 percent during the last five years while the property value per pupil in Maryland's suburbs and rural areas increased by more than 10 percent. In Cleveland the same comparison shows a 10 percent drop in the dollars behind each pupil for the city while the suburbs and rural areas increased by almost 5 percent.

Thus the proportionate amounts of money available to the city schools has been decreasing at the very time that the need for money has been increasing and as educational problems have become more intense.

When families drop out of the city to live in the suburbs they take with them their higher incomes, their middle-class motivation and drive, and the greater cultural exposure they offer their children.

One of the results has been a sharp break with the traditional make-up of the American school classroom: a cleavage which concentrates children of economically and culturally deprived families--white and Negro alike--in the central city school, effectively separated from the children of more affluent families.

These city children cost more to educate. How much more? Nobody knows for sure. We can only guess at what it would actually cost to run a topflight city school system. No city in the Nation has yet had the funds to do what its authorities would consider a truly effective job.

So if the sky is falling over the cities, if our city schools have been something less than a success, it isn't just because of racial and social inequity. It is also because of fiscal inequity.

My years of involvement with the massive and complex problems of the cities have taught me a good deal of humility. I don't pretend that I have all the answers for you, or that the Office of Education does. The Federal Government is a new partner in this task of improving education and we are working hard to make our assistance more effective.

In the financial picture of the schools, we cover only a corner of the canvas. Currently the Office of Education contributes about 8 percent of the total cost of public elementary-secondary education in the United States, with 92 percent coming from the States and local communities. Perhaps one day the Federal share will be greater. Conceivably it could double. Even so dramatic an increase, however, would remain a relatively minor element in the total economics of public education--though this 8 percent looms very large indeed when one considers its purpose and direction.

It has two major characteristics. First, it is additional money designed to provide services over and above what States and localities have previously found possible, and second, it is focussed on the most pressing educational problems--the culturally deprived child who is headed for failure, for example, the handicapped child who needs special teachers and services, research necessary to help the schools develop the capacity to successfully confront modern problems.

The contributions of President Johnson and the 89th Congress to American public education, contributions which will be recognized by history, have given schools the leverage to work on vital national challenges to education. The Federal Government neither can nor should assume the major day-in-and-day-out financial support of the schools. That is a job for the States and the localities, and my contention is that the States are just not doing an adequate job for the cities.

Some State legislatures have begun to recognize the serious misalignment of their tax distribution patterns. Massachusetts rewrote its formula two years ago, and while I gather that there are complaints that real equity has not yet been achieved for the cities, everyone seems to agree there has been progress. New York also established a new formula, and so did Pennsylvania after the Pittsburgh schools mounted a massive campaign to convince the State that the schools were confronting a critical financial crisis. Pennsylvania now provides 35 percent of Pittsburgh's \$42 million school budget; in 1964 the city got 23 percent of its budget from the State.

Pittsburgh has enjoyed other successes. The city passed a \$50 million bond issue to help finance the Great High Schools program last year when bond issues were failing like falling dominoes in cities across the country. The exodus of middle-class white families appears to have been halted; some suburban parents have asked if their children could get in the Great Scholars program. (They can, says Pittsburgh Superintendent Sid Marland--if they move back to Pittsburgh.) Significant

numbers of people do not seem to be moving back to Pittsburgh yet--but neither are they leaving.

How did they do it in Pittsburgh?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that the city's appointed Board of Education has demonstrated that its members are responsive to, in close touch with, and have the support of the business community, the minority community, and the intellectual community. The schools, partly by involving dozens of citizens groups in school planning from the very beginning, have managed to evoke broad public support for excellence in education and for providing the kind of financial support that excellence requires.

I do not mean in these references to Pittsburgh to veer into the issue of appointed school boards vis-a-vis elected boards. The difference in a school board's success in getting community support appears to lie less in the mechanics of selection than in the prestige attached to school board membership: that phenomenon that builds a tradition by which service on the school board--whether by appointment or election--becomes the business of the community's most distinguished citizens.

If your city has no such tradition, it is high time to get about establishing one. You'll have to start by persuading the people who occupy suites at the top of the skyscrapers to become involved with what's going on down there in the streets. Such people, I would suppose, are more ready than most to perceive the essential role of education in halting the erosion of the cities. Moreover, they have the potential of

being education's warmest advocates. Their political and economic muscle forms a resource that city schools can ill afford to do without.

Another vital step is to enlarge our view of the role of the schools--to cease looking upon them as special purpose islands in the city, separated from the complex life around them. The schools must learn to communicate with the community's other public and private agencies and to join in a coordinated, concerted effort.

School dollars will be in short supply for a long, long time--particularly in the city. Some of our effort must therefore go into correcting the imbalance in the economics of the city school as affected by State policies. At the same time, we must constantly seek ways to stretch those dollars that are available. One promising route lies through what might be called cooperative packaging, by which I refer to coordinating programs so that they serve double or triple functions.

We must learn to look at a problem, analyze it, and put together a package that coordinates every possible resource--not just those available from the Office of Education and not just those that are specifically educational. Working relationships must be established with a range of other groups and organizations, public and private alike. This kind of intermingling of interests has advantages that go beyond economic efficiency, vital as that is. It provides new stimulation and new understanding, an opportunity to share common concerns and perhaps to arrive at some new approaches together.

A drop-out campaign jointly designed and administered by the schools and such groups as the Urban League, the local Community Action Agency,

the P-T A and the Boys Clubs seems almost certain to reach and hold more youngsters than one conducted by the schools alone. One that uses drop-outs themselves in its planning and recruitment may be even more successful, even though its planners will have some difficult meetings.

We desperately need new ideas if we are to solve the financial as well as the social and cultural problems of the cities. There is a very real danger that even if we had twice as much money available to us, these additional funds might make relatively little difference. They might simply be dissipated in doing more of the same.

When I speak of the critical need for new ideas, I am by no means suggesting that we scrap the American system of education and begin again. That system has served us well. Rather I am thinking of the necessity of developing approaches and techniques capable of helping us deal with an array of challenges and situations that are without precedent in American society--challenges and situations that are most dramatically apparent in the cities.

Conceding that there are few genuinely new ideas, there remains the possibility of developing new uses of old ideas and of applying to city schools some of the techniques that have proved effective in other settings or endeavors. I'd like to suggest a couple of things that seem to me to fall in such a category, with no implication that any one of them or all together are necessarily the panacea for a particular city. I would remind you that what may be a rousing success in San Francisco may not work at all in Detroit; that what flops miserably in Atlanta may be the answer for Rochester.

1. Consortiums, such as are developing on the college level, might be developed for junior and senior high schools--perhaps even for elementary schools. All schools could have open enrollment, and students would attend several in a given day or week. The advantages might include a stronger curriculum, the elimination of duplication, and instant desegregation.
2. Pupil-teacher ratios might be established at a level of 20 to 1--at only slightly greater cost than the present arrangement if we had each group of 20 attend class half a day--instead of each group of 35 attend class all day--and provided opportunities for the group not in class to study, use language labs and computer instruction, and go on field trips chaperoned by volunteers and teacher aides.
3. Space might be made available in ghetto schools for such commercial establishments as grocery stores and beauty parlors, thereby providing new services to the community, part-time job opportunities for students, and extra revenue for the school system.
4. Students might be offered a new set of choices, so that no student is confronted with the rigid alternatives of either being in school full time or out of school altogether. It seems to me a strange affair to require every boy and girl to be full-time matriculating students without regard to individual needs and interests and problems--and to offer part-time programs to youngsters only when they have encountered such social disasters

as pregnancy or jail or dropout. Perhaps we need to develop a range of options, both in attendance requirements and in the kinds of programs that lead to the diploma. The combinations of work and study which can be offered to high school students are infinitely variable, and most of them remain unexplored by many high schools.

5. We might subsidize local craftsmen--for example, potters, silver-smiths, painters, and printers--by providing rent-free space in the schools with the proviso that they conduct a class or two in their specialty each day.
6. We vitally need a new approach to involving the parent in his children's life as a student and in the school itself. Too often school is a hostile fortress of white authority to the ghetto resident. Too often the parent has little faith in either the school or the learning process. And too often the parent does not understand his necessary role as a counselor, as a reader-of-stories, or simply as a person interested in his child's school life. We need to give parents a part in school planning, school decisions, and school operations toward involving those parents in their children's progress in the classroom. For school boards, principals, and teachers such involvement must go far beyond a P-TA tea party or the once-a-year school open house. It means permanently established programs in which parents become a part of the formal school

structure, as aides and as participants in the decision-making process.

7. New kinds of school district organization might be developed, in which some or all school district functions were decentralized. Metropolitan school boards that went all the way and established sub-districts within their system might very well find that they gained a better handle on policy, for as you well know, the larger a district, the more likely that policy decisions are made by administrators. School boards might look to several kinds of subcontractors when considering the development of such a sub-system--educational corporations, foundations, universities, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, local community groups, and perhaps others. In the beginning of any such arrangement, some contractors would probably do well, some might do badly. In either event, this kind of decentralization could, for the first time, bring to school administration the healthy competition that, it is hardly necessary to point out, has done pretty well by the free enterprise system. And at least equally important, it could be an effective mechanism for involving parents in the conduct of the schools. Here in the District of Columbia, the Board of Education has unanimously approved such an experiment. This year Antioch College will run two inner-city schools as community schools, under contract to the Board, and its plans call for a sub-system

school board whose membership includes parents, teachers, and students. The inclusion of parents and students on a sub-system board may not be the only way to help the community and the schools become mutually responsive, but I haven't heard of a better one.

I offer these suggestions more as examples of the kind of thinking we need to do about the problems we have in our schools than as complete prescriptions for immediate success. The fact is, however, that school boards and superintendents working together face decisions which will do much to determine the shape of public education for years to come. The melancholy conclusion an impartial observer would reach is that these decisions too often reflect a tendency to do things in the schools as we have always done them even though the traditional approaches don't seem to serve the pupils with the toughest problems.

It seems to me that city school board members have the most creative and exciting policy job in the country. If you are successful in finding ways to provide education that is at the same time excellent and relevant to life in our infinitely complicated, no longer unitary cities, you will have done much to preserve the strength and vitality of American society.

If the cities fail, so in the end will the Nation, and it is the schools that will in part determine the ultimate outcome. We in the Federal Government are committed to doing our appropriate share in providing you with resources to do the job.

As President Johnson has so well said:

The foremost goal of this Administration has been to create a legacy of educational excellence. We shall continue to pursue that goal until our schools and universities are as great as human wisdom can make them, and the doors to our classrooms are open to every American boy and girl.

#

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

**THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE
PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
POSITION OR POLICY.**